

Message Text

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ACTION AGRE-00

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DEPARTMENT PASS AGRICULTURE

FOL TEL SENT ACTION BANGKOK INFO VIENTIANE CHIANG MAI FROM UDORN
DATED SEPTEMBER 7, 1977 REPEATED TO YOU

QUOTE

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EO 11652: N/A
TAGS: ECON, TH
SUBJ: NORTHEAST DROUGHT ASSESSMENT

1. SUMMARY. DROUGHT CONDITIONS DO NOT APPEAR AT PRESENT TO
REPRESENT SEVERE THREAT TO AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION IN NORTHEAST
THIS YEAR. HOWEVER, DROUGHT HAS SERVED TO HIGHLIGHT ONCE AGAIN
NEVER-CEASING STRUGGLE OF 96 PERCENT OF REGION'S INHABITANTS TO
WRENCH A MEAGER LIVING FROM AN INFERTILE LAND. END SUMMARY.

2. CONOFF INTERVIEW WITH NORTHEASTERN AGRICULTURAL EXPERTS AUGUST
25-26, INCLUDING PROVINCIAL AGRICULTURAL OFFICERS, UNIVERSITY
RESEARCHER, MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE REPRESENTATIVE, AND A REGIONAL
ECONOMIST, REVEALED A GENERAL AGREEMENT THAT DAILY RAINFALL
WHICH BEGAN IN MOST OF REGION DURING PAST TEN DAYS APPEARS TO HAVE
MARKED END OF THIS YEAR'S DROUGHT. EXPERTS CONSULTED ALSO INDICATED
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GROWING CONSENSUS THAT DROUGHT MAY NOT HAVE AS SERIOUS AN IMPACT
ON 1977-78 RICE CROP YIELDS AS HAD BEEN EARLIER FEARED.

3. ROI ET PROVINCE AGRICULTURAL OFFICER WHO HAS BEEN ASSIGNED
RESPONSIBILITY FOR MONITORING DROUGHT CONDITIONS IN REGION
ESTIMATES THIS YEAR'S RICE CROP WILL ONLY BE FIVE TO TEN PERCENT
LESS THAN LAST YEAR'S YIELD. DEAN OF KHON KAEN UNIVERSITY'S

FACULTY OF AGRICULTURE PROJECTS A 20 TO 25 PERCENT DECLINE IN RICE PRODUCTION AS RESULT OF DROUGHT. HOWEVER, HE NOTES THAT NO FIRM ESTIMATE OF RICE YIELDS IS REALLY POSSIBLE UNTIL PLANTING SEASON IS COMPLETED AT END OF SEPTEMBER-EARLY OCTOBER.

4. A STUDY OF DROUGHT JUST COMPLETED BY STAFF OF CHIEF ECONOMIST OF KHON KAEN BRANCH OF BANK OF THAILAND INDICATES THAT ONLY 18 TO 20 PERCENT OF RICE PLANTED PRIOR TO AUGUST 1 HAS BEEN DAMAGED BY DROUGHT.

5. WITH REGARD TO OTHER CROPS, OUR SOURCES STATE THAT CORN HAS SUFFERED MOST FROM DROUGHT. THEY CLAIM THAT CORN CROPS IN KORAT, LOEI, SIRAKET AND PARTS OF UDORN PROVINCES HAVE BEEN LARGELY DESTROYED. OUR SOURCES SAY THAT AS RESULT, CORN PRODUCTION IN REGION IS EXPECTED TO DROP ABOUT 20 PERCENT THIS YEAR. OUR SOURCES STATE FURTHER THAT OTHER IMPORTANT SECONDARY CROPS SUCH AS TAPIOCA AND JUTE HAVE NOT BEEN ADVERSELY AFFECTED BY DROUGHT.

6. AT MEETING IN ROI ET PROVINCE AUGUST 11 OF ALL 16 NORTHEAST PROVINCIAL AGRICULTURAL OFFICERS TO DISCUSS DROUGHT SITUATION, IT WAS REPORTED THAT DROUGHT HAS BEEN MOST SEVERE AMONG SOUTHERN TIER OF PROVINCES ALONG BORDER WITH CAMBODIA, PARTICULARLY BURIRAM AND SISAKET. PARTS OF KHON KAEN AND UDORN PROVINCE HAVE ALSO SUFFERED CONSIDERABLY FROM DROUGHT. IN CONTRAST, DROUGHT HAS REPORTEDLY HAD ONLY SLIGHT EFFECT ON NONG KHAI AND NAKHON PHANOM PROVINCES BORDERING ON MEKONG RIVER.
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7. AS RESULT OF ROI ET MEETING A WORKING COMMITTEE HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED TO GATHER FURTHER DATA ON DROUGHT VIA A RADIO STATION SET UP IN ROI ET. THIS STATION IS SUPPOSEDLY IN DAILY CONTACT WITH ALL OF 16 PROVINCES AND WITH RAINMAKING TEAM DEPLOYED IN REGION.

8. MINAG REPRESENTATIVE INFORMED ATTENDEES AT MEETING THAT SHOULD DROUGHT CONTINUE HIS MINISTRY WILL SUPPORT CROP SUBSTITUTION EFFORTS. HE ADDED THAT SHOULD DROUGHT PROHIBIT ANY PLANTING IN CERTAIN AREAS, RTG CONTEMPLATE INITIATING LOCAL PUBLIC WORKS PROJECTS TO PROVIDE EMPLOYMENT TO FARMERS.

9. COMMENT: ASSESSMENT OF DROUGHT BY NORTHEAST AGRICULTURAL OBSERVERS WE HAVE CONSULTED IS NOTABLY LESS PESSIMISTIC THAN REPORTS WHICH HAVE APPEARED IN BANGKOK PRESS PAST FEW WEEKS. OUR SOURCES MAKE POINT THAT THIS YEAR'S RAINFALL, WHILE ADMITTEDLY A BIT LATER AND SCARCER THAN USUAL, IS ACTUALLY RATHER TYPICAL FOR REGION WHICH ONLY RECEIVES REALLY AMPLE RAINFALL ABOUT ONCE EVERY FIVE YEARS. SOURCES MAINTAIN FURTHER THAT SHOULD RAINS WHICH BEGAN PAST WEEK CONTINUE AT NORMAL RATE, OVERALL IMPACT OF DROUGHT SHOULD NOT BE SERIOUS.

8. INFORMAL SOUNDINGS WE HAVE MADE WITH SENIOR LOCAL OFFICIALS TEND TO CONFIRM GENERAL PICTURE OF DROUGHT'S EFFECT PRESENTED BY AGRICULTURAL EXPERTS. YET, AT SAME TIME, WE CONTINUE TO HEAR ABOUT COMPLAINTS FROM FARMERS THAT INDICATE WHILE THIS YEAR MAY NOT BE A DISASTER IT WILL BE A DIFFICULT YEAR FOR THEM. ALSO INHABITANTS OF PROVINCIAL TOWNS STATE THAT REGARDLESS OF AMELIORATIVE EFFECT OF FINAL ARRIVAL OF RAINS, THEY EXPECT EARLY EFFECTS OF DROUGHT TO PRODUCE INCREASE IN PRICE OF LOCAL RICE NEXT YEAR, TO BE FOLLOWED BY PRICE INCREASE OF OTHER BASIC NECESSITIES.

9. WE WOULD FURTHER NOTE THAT EARLY STAGES OF DROUGHT ALSO APPEARED TO ACCENTUATE PERENNIAL PROBLEM OF UNDEREMPLOYMENT IN NORTHEAST. SOME FARMERS WHO ORDINARILY WOULD HAVE BEEN BUSY WORKING IN THEIR FIELDS IN JUNE AND JULY WERE PROBABLY FORCED TO SEEK LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WORK ELSEWHERE, USUALLY IN PROVINCIAL TOWNS OR IN BANGKOK. WHEN REPRESENTATIVES OF US FIRM RECRUITING WORKERS FOR PROJECTS IN SAUDI ARABIA VISITED UDORN IN EARLY AUGUST, THEY WERE PRACTICALLY MOBBED BY ANXIOUS JOB SEEKERS, MANY OF WHOM REPORTEDLY CAME FROM RURAL BACKGROUNDS.

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O'DONOHUE

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